"Not What We Ought to Say": Male Anxiety and the Power of Female Speech in Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Richard III*

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Female agency and feminine power are issues that have become much discussed in the world of Shakespeare studies under the influence of feminist criticism. Much of the attention here, even in book-length studies of the subject, is divided to treat one play at a time. While this is useful in illustrating the many different ways in which Shakespeare treats female agency in his characters and the ways in which this changes from work to work, joint examination of multiple texts also holds many promising advantages. Through the exploration of some of the specific similarities in the way these issues are treated between two works, some consistent illuminating factors about the nature of male attitudes toward female power become apparent.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* and *Richard III* offer sound examples of this phenomenon. The interaction between male and female speech in these two plays exhibits a profound anxiety inherent in many of the male characters about the possibility of serious feminine power and female agency. Phyllis Rackin, in her study of women in Shakespeare, notes the playwright's tendency to downplay or discredit feminine power, as it is "repeatedly characterized as threatening or demonic" (48). Rackin argues also that Shakespeare's plays often advocate female subordination, as was typical during the period. Kathleen McLuskie also notes the "connection between sexual insubordination and anarchy" in *King Lear* (35). In two plays so profoundly concerned with the "natural" order of things—of the state, of familial relations, and of structures of power—the overabundant presence of powerful female characters threatens the necessary balance and order. To this end, an analysis of the most potent form of expression of power in a dramatic work, that of speech, seems especially appropriate here. Specific concerns of gendered speech—female speeches of power and the efforts of male speech to undermine such power—are brought about by the texts of the plays themselves.

Clearly the most apparent and most discussed scene of gendered speech is the opening of *King Lear*. In this scene, Lear urges his daughters to compete for power through speech, "Which of you shall we say doth love us most, /That we our

largest bounty may extend" (I.i.53-53). Though Lear urges his daughters to speak here, the reader must note also that the final "say" resides in Lear's mouth. Speech is brought to the immediate forefront in this scene, with variations of the words "speak" or "say" used eleven times in the ninety some odd lines that make up the initial questioning of the three daughters. This does not include additional variants on this theme such as "profess," "word," and "tell." The importance of speech in this scene is also recognized by critics, and is brought to the forefront in William Dodd's intensive study of this scene entitled "Impossible Worlds: What Happens in *King Lear*, Act 1, Scene 1." For Dodd, *personal* and *interpersonal* forms of communication and speaking are what bring characters into real existence (480). Speech is also linked with physical reality in the form of land, and therefore power, in this scene. The speaker of the fairest words will leave with the most power here.

It is important to note here, that though Cordelia's "nothing" resounds here and sets the rest of the play in motion, Goneril and Regan offer little more than this in their speeches. Goneril loves Lear "more than word can wield…A love that makes breath poor and speech unable" (I.i.57, 62). This tactic is especially effective for Goneril, because it acknowledges her own power to speak, which Lear renders silent. In this, Goneril anticipates the efforts that male speech will apply in attempts to efface female speech. Through effacing her own speech, Goneril appropriates the power that would be taken from her if her language had demanded it. A female voice vying for the possession of the land offered to Goneril here would be "unnatural," and her refusal to take full ownership of language which would gain her this object plays to flattery even more than an assertive voice would.

Regan presents Lear with a similar effacement; only her denial goes one step further, to deny herself action as well as the power of words. Regan, then, appropriates both the denial of feminine power through speech and denial of female agency that will become characteristic of male speech in these two plays. "I profess/ myself an enemy to all other joys/Which the most precious square of sense professes" (I.i.75-76). Lear is thrilled with both of these responses and rewards both Regan and Goneril with power for their speeches of self-effacement.

Cordelia's famous "nothing" differs not so much in content from her sisters' offers, but in her apparent refusal to *obey* her father's speech. Rather than self-effacement, Cordelia chooses representation of truth, which carries more weight: "I am sure my love's/More ponderous than my tongue" (I.i.79-80). Cordelia's "nothing" asserts more of a self than all the words Goneril and Regan offer. She claims for her speech a connection to owned truth: "I cannot heave/My heart into my mouth" (I.i.93-94). Catherine Cox , in discussing the contradictions inherent in Cordelia's character, notes the problematic nature of Cordelia's words, arguing, "her reluctant participation in Lear's flattery game is remarkable in its ambiguity"

(146). Ideal speech for Cordelia is a manifestation of *her* heart. Her "nothing" also suggests further agency in decision-making ability. Both of these Lear rejects, requesting Cordelia to "Mend your speech a little" (I.i.96). This suggests that what Lear is truly after is not truth, but empty flattery. If Cordelia's speech were to change after this, Lear would know that it had been "mended." He deems this latter option as more satisfactory, as it would confirm the submission of Cordelia's speech of agency to his own verbalized request for compliance.

Ultimately, then, what this scene reveals is Lear's request for confirmation of the submission of his daughters' speech to his own. Their acquisition of land and power is subservient to this. Jeffery Stern, in discussing the politics of Lear's decision to divide his kingdom, notes the power of speech here: "Lear seeks ultimately to establish a new dispensation in which words will not merely symbolize but will equal words" (300). Seen in this light, Cordelia's lack of speech is attributed not to the feminine ideal of silence, but to a much more threatening female agency seeming to negate the power of Lear's male speech. This scene goes far in establishing the process of male subjugation of female speech in these plays. Lear banishes Cordelia from himself, linking her with unnatural beings, as she has upset the "natural" order of affection by refusing to bend her speech to her father's male speech. Lear swears here by "the mysteries of Hecate" and welcomes "the barbarous Scythian," to his bosom in place of Cordelia. The invocation of unnatural beings in conjunction with unsatisfactory or threatening female speech becomes a primary method of male appropriation or denial of its power.

A similar unnatural order is implied in the first scene of *Richard III* when Clarence appears, being taken to the Tower. Richard, whose own unnatural presence is the real driving force of the action, attempts to throw suspicion on the queen's speech to draw focus away from his own. It is meant to signal an unnatural state of affairs when Richard claims that "men are ruled by women" in the current arrangement at court (I.i.62). To be subject to this state, Richard adds, makes even the male members of court feminine and unnatural: "I think it is our way/If we will keep favor with the king/To be her men and wear her livery" (I.i.78-80). According to Madonne M. Miner, this is consistent with "a tactic that Richard employs throughout: an allocation of guilt along sexual lines so that women are invariably at fault" (242). That it is specifically the queen's speech that Richard is attempting to throw into suspicion here is apparent in his accusation that women, including the queen, have become "mighty gossips in our monarchy" (I.i.83).

One of the conflicts inherent in *Richard III*, of course, is that female speech does actually carry a large amount of power and weight. The truth of Queen Margaret's words, for example echoes repeatedly throughout the play, and male characters acknowledge this truth as the play's actions confirm it. However, the

truth inherent in the words of the line of English queens in this play does not necessarily confirm the existence of female power not sundered by male speech. In fact, the play in many ways seems to be continually enacting the fact of female dependence on male power. In sequence, the Duchess of York, Queen Margaret and Queen Elizabeth all experience the loss of royal power upon the death of their husbands and sons. Lady Anne and Elizabeth the younger become queens dependent on the actions of Richard and Richmond.

However, these strict definitions of power are called into question by multiple factors. Most importantly, female speech is seen as a threat, indicated by the efforts that Richard expends in attempts to negate it. The power of speech is proven to be an essential asset of male power as well. This is a play of influence, and Richard's ability to speak while Edward IV is silenced by illness is crucial to the power dynamics operating within the kingdom. Even while Edward is still bodily alive, Richard begins the process of negating Elizabeth's power through his speech. Also complicating these definitions of gendered power is the fact that Richard's (and subsequently Richmond's) claims to power are legitimized by relationships with women. This factor first becomes apparent in Richard's decision to woo Lady Anne "not all so much for love/As for another secret close intent" (I.i.157-58).

Richard's wooing of Lady Anne presents one of the most chilling examples of the potency of Richard's male speech. Lady Anne appears as mourner of her father-in-law, Henry VI. Though deprived of this male figure who would have ensured her power in the state, Anne retains the power of her speech, armed with curses for Richard: "thou has made the happy earth thy hell/Filled it with cursing cries and deep exclaims" (I.ii.51-52). The politics of power of speech in this scene are complex, and the scene bears many interesting parallels to the opening scene of *Lear*. Throughout the scene, Richard works to render Anne's anger as non-threatening. Like Goneril and Regan in Act I, scene 1 of *Lear*, Richard claims authority for his speech even by negating his ability to speak, calling Anne "fairer than tongue can name thee" (I.ii.81). His main technique here is a refusal to conform to her method of speech. After Anne's series of curses, Richard appeals to her, "wonderful, when angels are so angry/ Vouchsafe, divine perfection of a woman/Of these supposed crimes to give me leave/By circumstances but to acquit myself" (I.ii.74-77).

Not only does Richard manage to disarm Anne's formidable position as a woman wronged by disembodying her as an "angel" and "divine perfection," but he also turns the dialogue away from her ability to speak (in the form of curses) toward a discussion of his own ability to do so. Indeed much of the scene passes without a concrete decision on this point. In essence, Richard appropriates Anne's questions as the opportunity to acquit himself. Richard's bloody physical actions

in killing Henry VI and Anne's husband Prince Edward are even rendered as debatable abstracts of speech by the repetition of the word "say" in relation to these actions:

> RICHARD: Say that I slew them not?
> ANNE: Then say they were not slain.
> But dead they are, and, devilish slave, by thee (I.ii.89-90).

Much of this scene is taken up with quibbling over verbal differences and the subtle changing of words. This is also true of the later scene in the play that may be seen as a companion to this one, in which Richard negotiates for the hand of Elizabeth the younger. This scene will receive further attention later in this analysis.

Richard ultimately concludes by laying double blame for the two deaths on two women: Lady Anne and Queen Margaret. He blames Henry's death on Margaret's speech, "I was provoked by her sland'rous tongue/That laid their guilt upon my guiltless shoulders" (I.ii.97-98). Here, Margaret's female speech is powerful, but dangerous and unnatural, provoking violent action. Richard faults Anne's beauty with Prince Edward's death, denying Anne even the ability of speech here. He is captured not by her words but by her appearance, making her a passive agent in her husband's death.

The final triumph of Richard's speech over Anne's action is confirmed in the opportunity he gives her to kill him. She refuses, saying, "I will not be thy executioner" (I.ii.185). Richard then requests her to speak, to require him to kill himself. Anne refuses indirectly, saying, "I have already" (I.ii.187). Richard, however, claims authority over Anne's earlier speech, qualifying it by saying, "That was in thy rage./Speak it again, and even with the work/This hand, which for thy love did kill thy love/Shall for thy love kill a far truer love" (I.ii.187-190). The dizzying effect of the repetition of "for thy love" achieves both emphasis and confusion, adding authority to Richard's speech, allowing him to claim its truth. He claims that his heart is "figured in my tongue" (I.ii.193). This statement, almost an exact reversal of Cordelia's "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth," is a marker of the constructed nature of Richard's speech. This constructed nature is confirmed by the double meaning of the word "figured," signifying both a clear rendering, but also a *rendering* effect, implying constructed or false.

By the end of this scene, however, Richard has his ring on Anne's finger, and has obtained control over her speech. "Since you teach me how to flatter you," she states, "Imagine I have said farewell already" (I.ii.223-224). She entrusts the language of her farewell to Richard. His triumph is emphasized in his subsequent speech, which also glories in his appropriation of her language of anger: "I that

killed her husband and his father/To take her in her heart's extremest hate/With curses in her mouth" (I.ii.230-232). This is the ultimate victory for Richard. He has succeeded in obtaining both bodily and verbal confirmation of hope for his possession of Anne. His victory over her threatening female speech paves the way for his appropriation of the political power inherent in her person.

In both of the above scenes, submission of female speech is required. Lady Anne succumbs, while Cordelia maintains the integrity of her truthful speech. The question of the submission of feminine speech takes on takes on a different aspect when applied to figures who are clearly not submissive characters. Goneril and Regan in *King Lear* and Queen Margaret in *Richard III* demand to be taken seriously, and their actions are potently felt in the plots of these works. However, there are some indications in the ways in which Shakespeare constructs his language, that the power of these figures is too threatening, and there must be some effort to negate the potency of their words.

Lear's eventual recognition of Goneril's threatening power links itself in his mind with the false nature of her words in the first scene. When he imagines a mock trial for her with Edgar and the Fool, speech becomes a main issue. Also, Lear makes numerous attempts to render words and speech unnecessary, referencing instead evidence of appearance and circumstance. In calling the imaginary Goneril and Regan to the stand, Lear refers to them as "she-foxes," undermining them by linking them to animals, but also linking them to the cunning, crafty nature of foxes (III.vi.22). Lear has recognized their artifice here, an artifice that has manifested itself chiefly through speech. Also, the Fool parodies a ballad that contains the line "And she must not speak," furthering the atmosphere hostile to Goneril's speech (III.vi.26). Of course the real irony here is that Goneril literally cannot speak, as she is not physically present. This is evidenced by the Fool's observance that "She cannot deny it" (III.vi.50). The fact that Lear and the Fool persist in their silencing of the absent figure points to the especially threatening nature of Goneril's speech.

Left with no verbal response from their imaginary Goneril, Lear and the Fool must look elsewhere for evidence of her treachery. Now that Goneril cannot speak, however, her "warped looks proclaim/What store her heart is made on" (III.vi.52-53). In the face of female speech as threatening and powerful as that of Goneril, Lear must find ways to undermine it. Repeated silencing is one way to counter this, and physical manifestation of a corrupt nature makes speech irrelevant.

Richard uses similar tactics to counter the aggressive, threatening speech the Queen Margaret implicates in her curses early in *Richard III*. He repeatedly links her with witchcraft, which is an indicator of threatening feminine power. This, like the "warped looks" of Goneril in the mock trial scene, would be an indicator to

others present that her words should not be trusted. Richard calls Margaret "Foul wrinkled witch" (I.iii.164) and a "hateful withered hag" who performs "charms" (I.iii.215), while Dorset and Hastings also provide hindering male speech. Hastings refers to her as a "false-boding woman" making "frantic curses" (I.iii.247), while Dorset calls her "lunatic" (I.iii.254). The rest of the play will testify to the potency of Margaret's words; her curses for Edward, Prince of Wales, Queen Elizabeth, Rivers, Dorset, Hastings, and Richard all come to pass by the end of the play ("Margaret's curse if fall'n upon our heads/When she exclaimed on Hastings, you, and I/For standing by when Richard stabbed her son" (III.iii.15-17)). Other factors are obviously involved in forwarding these events, but the male figures in this scene are clearly threatened by Margaret's suggestions. She asks, "Can curses pierce the clouds and enter heaven?" (I.iii.195). Richard attempts, in essence, to deny her curses this privilege by denying her the ability to finish:

> QUEEN MARGARET: O, let me make the period to my curse.
> RICHARD: 'Tis done by me, and ends in "Margaret."
> QUEEN ELIZABETH: Thus have you breathed your curse against yourself (I.iii.238-240).

Richard's final effort to negate Margaret's words is to appropriate them as his own. In doing so, however, he does not negate their power. His wish to claim ownership over them serves as testimony to their threatening nature.

In many ways it seems that Richard's rise to power is dependent on the subversion of female speech. He achieves high status in the court by discrediting Queen Elizabeth, "Edward's wife, that monstrous witch/Consorted with that harlot, strumpet Shore/That by their witchcraft thus have markèd me" (III.iv.70-72). Richard hereby negates two of the things that would counter the power of his male speech: Queen Margaret's words and his own "unnatural" physical deformity. (Physical manifestation of evil intent is, of course, used by Lear against Goneril in the scene earlier in this analysis.) Lady Anne reflects on Richard's earlier subversion of her speech before she leaves to be crowned queen: "And I with all unwillingness will go…Anointed let me be with deadly venom/And die ere men can say, 'God save the queen'" (IV.i.57, 61-62). She wishes to stop the tongues of men before they can declare her Richard's queen, just as he stopped her tongue earlier in its protestations against his suit.

Act IV, Scene 4 reads like a jury's list of crimes committed by Richard against the women of the play. Tellingly, however, this scene does not affirm the ultimate submission of female speech in this play, but serves instead to strengthen it. Queen Elizabeth acknowledges the similarity of her situation and Margaret's. "O thou well skilled in curses," she pleads, "stay awhile/And teach me how to curse

mine enemies" (IV.iv.16-17). Elizabeth has recognized the power inherent in Margaret's words: "My words are dull. O, quicken them with thine!" (IV.iv.124). Collectively, the women in this scene recognize the power carried in words and the parts that words have played in Richard's rise to power. Thus, both male and female speech are potentially threatening here, as the Duchess of York asks, "Why should calamity be full of words?" (IV.iv.126). Eventually, the women resolve to unite their speech against Richard: "If so, then be not tongue-tied; go with me/And in the breath of bitter words let's smother/My damnèd son that thy two sweet sons smothered" (IV.iv.132-134). Words are active here, and have the destructive power to "smother" as effectively as Richard's commands to the murderers of the princes in the tower. The Duchess of York calls Elizabeth's speech out of submission, and both go forth to confront Richard.

Even here, however, Richard repeatedly attempts to counter their powerful female speech. The first of these attempts involves the overtly masculine sphere of warfare: "Either be patient and entreat me fair/Or with the clamorous report of war/Thus will I drown your exclamations" (IV.iv.152-154). This retort does not by any means diminish the potential truth contained in the women's words, nor does it deny their power. It claims only the ability to make them inaudible. This passage presents perhaps the most overt example of the warfare being waged between male and female speeches of power in these plays. Richard threatens an actual attack her to counter these women's words.

What follows is somewhat of a verbal battle, with Richard attempting to silence, or at least silence the meaning of, his mother's words. The Duchess of York implores "let me speak," "hear me speak," and "hear me a word" in rapid succession in this passage, Richard intervening only momentary futile attempts to silence her and finally threatening to depart before hearing her (IV.iv.160, 181, 183). Richard's mother finally succeeds in speaking, however, and utters her curse for Richard, seconded by Elizabeth's "I say amen to her" (IV.iv.198). With the strength of two powerful female figures, then, Richard's curse is voiced. Its subsequent enacting again would suggest the active power of female speech, but the play's ending is still to be discussed.

What, then, of Lear and of two of Shakespeare's most deviously physically active female characters, Regan and Goneril? Having first exhibited their ability to bend their speech to advantage themselves in Lear's esteem then this ability having been discussed in their absence in the mock trial scene, Goneril and Regan return to prominence in the second half of the play. Their roles here, however, seem more complex than their appearances in acts one and two. Their skilled manipulation is certainly present, particularly in Regan's shocking (verbal) participation in Gloucester's blinding and her subsequent murder of a servant.

However, the sisters begin to complicate their status when both form attachments with Edmund.

At this juncture, both women's speech begins to take on a self-submissive aspect that offers subtle differences from the tactic used in the earlier scene with Lear. Goneril offers Edmund her support in a way that denies her own speech. She gives Edmund a favor to wear, saying, "Wear this; spare speech/Decline your hear. This kiss, if it durst speak/Would stretch thy spirits up into the air" (IV.ii.21-23). Goneril, in essence disappears here. The kiss does not, in fact, speak, and even if it did, its power would be used only to raise Edmund. Goneril's advancement is only secondary. Regan self-surrenders in a similar manner: "General/Take thou my soldiers, prisoners, patrimony/Witness the world, that I create thee here/My lord and master" (V.iii.75-79). Regan, though she does claim the active "I create," surrenders her privileges to Edmund in a way that calls attention to her own speech as submissive in calling the world to "witness." The world does not hear this action; the world sees it. Thus Regan's voice disappears as effectively as Goneril's does in kissing Edmund.

This dual submission, however, creates a problem. Unlike in the first scene of the play, there is no equal reward to be divided between Goneril and Regan for their surrendering of their speech. In this way, this is false submission much like that which wins them power and land in the first scene. In both cases, the women assume an advantage to be gained through submissive speech. Here, instead of offering "nothing" in empty words, they offer to become "nothing" for Edmund. Ironically, this is what they both do become, as both die as a result of laying claim to Edmund. In attempting to further upset "nature," in choosing a more desirable/advantageous mate, both women subject themselves to derogatory male speech. Goneril is reduced to nothing but a female form in Albany's mind. Her treacherous speech and actions have caused him to erase from her all ability to speak or seem human: "Were 't my fitness/To let these hands obey my blood/They are apt enough to dislocate and tear/Thy flesh and bones: howe'er thou art a fiend/A woman's shape doth shield thee" (IV.ii.63-67).

In contrast to Goneril and Regan's seemingly voluntary surrender of female speech, *Richard III* offers one more scene of bargaining for marriage, (IV.iv), but here it is Richard who stands to gain from the match. In this scene, as in his wooing of Lady Anne, the reader sees the power of Richard's male speech. Queen Elizabeth, who has so much motivation to hate Richard for the murder of her sons, matches Richard's quantity of words throughout much of this encounter. However, as the scene progresses, we see Richard's male language begin to take over, as in his earlier appropriation of Margaret's curse. Here, his repetition of "say" and "tell her" puts his own words into Queen Elizabeth's mouth, as do her responses, which often begin with a repetition of Richard's words in his previous

lines (IV.iv.345, 346, 349,355, 359). Queen Elizabeth's eventual agreement to take Richard's suit to her daughter does not bode well for the fate of female speech in the play. Though Margaret's and the Duchess of York's curses on Richard do come to pass, there are aspects about the ending of this play that make it troubling in terms of the power of female speech.

Indeed the endings of both of these plays present problems for female speech. Not only are all of the voices male at the ends of both of these plays, but the favorable nature of feminine silence seems to be emphasized in both places. The unsettling nature of the final scene of *King Lear* is nearly universally acknowledged. Cordelia's death is upsetting for a number of reasons, but when considered as a statement about female speech, it is especially revealing and troubling. Goneril and Regan have already been silenced, justly so, as Albany would have the audience believe: "This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble/Touches us not with pity" (V.iii.233-234). Their false, power-hungry speech will trouble no one any longer. It is difficult, however, even for the characters on stage, to accept Cordelia's death. Here, as in the opening scene, Lear is begging Cordelia to speak. This would signal life in her seemingly dead body: "What is 't thou say'st?" (V.iii.274). Here again, Lear is asking Cordelia to speak for his own benefit. For Carol Chillington Rutter, Cordelia's body becomes an object for Lear, "On this surface Lear will inscribe his particular desires and fantasies, for Cordelia is Lear's object…the spectacle that holds and directs the all-male gaze, passive, unresisting, whatever Lear makes her" (5). He has not accepted her female claim to agency through speech, as his next lines are "Her voice was ever soft/Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman" (V.iii.274-275).

Lear remembers Cordelia's speech as an ideal, denying her speech independent will even after her death. He is still misinterpreting Cordelia, just as he was in the first scene. Though her "nothing," in terms of the softness of her speech, is now seen as ideal, her "nothing" in her lack of response is unacceptable. Lear is unable to resign himself to his refusal and therefore dies. Female speech, then, both lovely and malevolent, is denied agency through death. The play's anxieties about this speech have "come full circle," in the words of Edmund. Though Edgar ends the play by stating that the remaining society must "speak what we feel, not what we ought to say," only male characters remain to hear his words. This idea is no longer threatening, as there is no female presence to inhabit it.

Female speech would seem to fare better in the male ending of *Richard III*; after all, Margaret, the Duchess of York, and Queen Elizabeth's curses have proven true in Richard's death and Richmond's victory. The ghost of Lady Anne is even given a final say in sealing Richard's doom, and there is promise of marriage, not death for society. However it is in this promise of marriage that the modern reader may find some problem for female speech. Richmond's

authoritative final speech, though presenting a positive image for Shakespeare’s Tudor audience in promising the end of the Wars of the Roses and the establishment of the Tudor house, is troubling for female speech. The young Elizabeth, who has spoken not one line throughout the entire play, is now taken up as an advancement of Richmond’s claim to the throne. Young Elizabeth’s lack of agency, made apparent in Richard’s bargaining for her hand, is still present here. However, it is quieted by the positive associations with Richmond’s ascendancy into power. The crowning of Richmond as Henry VII is what this play is moving towards, and it seems that other concerns, including female agency, are subject to this. The women are “subsumed in [the play’s] hegemonic discourse” of the ascension of Henry VII (Howard and Rackin 267). If Richmond does not lay claim to Elizabeth here, she would stand as a remnant of the opposing house of York. Though her presence would not directly threaten his claim, the unresolved nature of the conflict between these two houses would. Her physical and verbal presence in the scene may have made Richmond’s arbitrary claiming of her hand more difficult, at least dramatically. By denying her presence and speech in this moment, Shakespeare eliminates all of these worries.

As these examples clearly show, powerful female speech presents a threat to the male characters involved in struggles for political power in these plays. Just as subjection of the female body is required for Richard and Edmund (though he does not live long enough to claim this) to gain more power, submission of female speech is required for the stability of this power. The threatening and potent nature of female speech is seen through the anxiety shown by male characters in their repeated attempts to silence it. As the final scenes of both of these plays demonstrate, a return to any sort of “order” is much more effective after the silencing of powerful female speech of feminine agency.

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